



The Inevitability of Stardom

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When the works of artists from Bauhaus were first shown in Moscow in 1924, no one really liked them. As the critic Alexei Sidorov put it at the time: "The products of German constructivism all had an air of prosperity; everything was so impeccable and precisely fitted, straightened out, hammered together, and lit by electric lamps; everything looked like a neat little toy."

This appraisal marks the schism that was already emerging between communist and capitalist art. Communist art saw no point in making "neat little toys," that is, perfect forms; all closure would bring the risk of fetishization. "Every form is a frozen snapshot of the process. And the artwork is a stop on the path of becoming, and never just a static goal," wrote Lissitzky, excluding everything passive and frozen to the point of excluding materiality itself. The figure formerly known as the painter or sculptor under capitalism was now to paint murals on tram-cars, design leaflets, write theoretical texts, or paint with light in the air of the darkened cinema. Russian art was already moving in this direction before the revolution, calling itself not abstract, but "non-objective," thus demanding the creation of artworks that would not be objects at all. The utopia of communist art consisted in its rejection of any unified, isolated form whatsoever on the grounds of its tendency toward fetishism. In the contemporary capitalist world, artists are also sometimes captivated by the desire for "non-objectivity"

Carbon Drawings
Christoph Weber
2003-2005

in the broad sense of the word, i.e. the desire to dematerialize the object and to thus evade the pitfalls of reification. Christoph Weber knows more about this desire than many of his colleagues; he has explored it in his Carbon Drawings, projects of ephemeral sculptures. But in a world in which art still chiefly exists through exhibitions with a subtext of market implications, objecthood and the artwork's "expositional" quality are regulatory "principles of reality;" all political or even poetic projects must be reified immediately, submitting to the laws of form as if they were universal laws of gravity. It seems to me that this is precisely what Christoph Weber's The First Minutes of October is all about. Using complicated technology, it turns the first frames of Sergei Eisenstein's October into a huge, star-like, metal structure, transforming the moving image into a static object.

Of course, this is an ambivalent gesture. On the one hand, Weber is returning Eisenstein to suprematism, or, as one might put it, returning suprematism to Eisenstein. Eisenstein's avant-garde roots are common knowledge, as is his debt to abstract art: "montage" was a term he picked from El Lissitzky, who, in turn, was a student of Malevich. The very notion of montage assumed that somebody had already broken the whole into many smaller parts; in Russia, in the 1920s, this somebody was clearly Malevich. But October, a com-

missioned re-staging of historical events on the anniversary of the revolution, was made in the crucial year of 1927, when Eisenstein was already moving from avant-garde film to “Stalinist” cinema, from the montage to the narrative. In 1925, Malevich had already warned Eisenstein that he had a great understanding of contrasts, but that “these contrasts could create a situation in which the idea can win out over the contrasts as such . . . which will lose their initial sharpness.” And this is exactly what happened. The idea won out. In October, the sharpness of contrasts (that is, of stridently avant-garde montage) is not as vivid as in Stachka or Potemkin and no longer stands in the center but was replaced by a grandiose propagandistic illusion. Christoph Weber literally returns this *sharpness of contrast* to Eisenstein, as if to free him from the stranglehold of Stalinist ideology, opening a new world of pure geometric form, as if this were the world of human freedom. But this also makes Eisenstein’s idea more direct, explicit, and—to use Walter Benjamin’s term—more “expositional.” On the other hand, Christoph Weber must be acutely aware of the fact that by erecting a monument to the film through a symbol form that is “sharp” (read: perfect and finished in a strident style), he has immediately turned Eisenstein’s film into a thing. October becomes part of the “opium of life,” which is what Alexander

Telefunken and Tesla
Christoph Weber
2007

Rodchenko called all the things in shop windows and the artworks in the studios of Western artists. We can assume that Christoph Weber knows what this means. Because he is sensitive to different cultural contexts and plays with their congruence and incongruence. Take, for example, his earlier project Telefunken and Tesla, in which two tape recorders from East and West Germany hold a dialogue of two deaf people. In this sense, Weber's operation on Eisenstein reads as a parody of how the West—or the entire world, since the West is now everywhere—sees the Russian avant-garde. It immediately turns the avantgarde into a thing, crystallizing it into perfect forms for individual aesthetic consumption, and by doing so, destroys it completely. It raves over individual objects, automatically isolating them from their context, stylizing their outer forms and calling this a homage or a heroic revival, calling something elegant even though it was considered as the destruction of an entire world order, hanging something over a sofa when it was actually meant to serve the world revolution against this very sofa, calling something painting or sculpture when it was in fact creativity beyond all professional and disciplinary boundaries. This is what the contemporary world does to communist art. It is even capable of turning the communist symbol, the five-pointed star, into a glamorous "instant-star" for the media.

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On the other hand, I would want to set up a purely spatial possibility for the immediate interaction of each sketch with the other, jumping from one to the other and back. Interlinks from one to the other. Interaction of one in relation to the other. Such a simultaneity and interpenetration of these notes could only be possible if the book had the shape of ... a sphere!

An unpublished manuscript from 1926

Is there any way of fighting this inevitability? This is something Eisenstein was already thinking about in 1926; for him, even the book was too isolated, static, and fetishized as an object. His weapon was space:

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This is why Eisenstein shot the first frames of October from different points of view or “sectors.” His goal was to provide the collective spectator with a dialectical image, a space for argument and democracy. Christoph Weber is working in the same vein by making the first shots of Eisenstein’s film three-dimensional. The spatial form of rays shooting out to all sides is a dynamic projection of the spherical book Eisenstein was dreaming of. Today, it would seem that Eisenstein’s idea has become reality in the logic of the internet with its structure of ultra-rapid rays, vectors, and tangents, always ready to resist the fetishizing logic of production that keeps spitting out all these useless “objects.” Then again, even here, there are no guarantees. Today, Eisenstein’s dream of endless interlinks can easily become disorienting and entropic, as Christoph Weber shows in another

Sehnsucht, Reichtum, Glück
Christoph Weber
2001

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book project Sehnsucht, Reichtum, Glück. And what's more, even the sea of interlinks automatically crystallizes into its own fifteen-minute-superstars. Thus, The First Minutes of October could be a monument to all the heroic attempts to evade the death trap of the finished form, attempts that are foiled again and again.